DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 304 602 CG 021 475

AUTHOR Cooney, Teresa M.
TITLE Coresidence with Adult Children: A Comparision of Divorced and Widowed Women.
INSTITUTION North Carolina Univ., Chapel Hill. Carolina Population Center.
SPONS AGENCY National Inst. of Child Health and Human Development (NIH), Bethesda, Md.
PUB DATE 21 Nov 88
GRANT 5T32HD07168
NOTE 21p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Gerontological Society (41st, San Francisco, CA, November 18-22, 1988).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adult Children; Age Differences; Comparative Analysis; *Divorce; Middle Aged Adults; *Mothers; *Older Adults; Parent Child Relationship; *Place of Residence; Social Support Groups; *Widowed

ABSTRACT

This study examined basic differences in the prevalence of coresidence with adult children for middle-aged and older divorcees and widows. Data were obtained from the June 1985 Marital and Fertility History Supplement to the Current Population Survey. Subjects consisted of 11,484 married, 3,854 widowed, and 1,994 divorced women with adult children. The results revealed that for middle-aged women (those under age 60), there were only slight differences between marital status groups; approximately one-half of the women in each group coresided with an adult child. For older women (aged 60 and older), widows were more likely than married women to be residing with an adult child. Widows and divorcees did not differ substantially in the likelihood of coresidence with adult children; slightly more than 25% of the women in each group resided with an adult child. Further analyses revealed that age, recency of marital disruption, and type of marital disruption all played a role in the women's patterns of coresidence with adult children. Cases of coresidence involving daughters rather than sons were more likely among divorced than widowed women in both age groups. Divorced women were more likely than widows to share a residence in which they were not the household head. The results suggest that when the type of marital disruption occurs "off-time" (widowhood in middle age, divorce in old age), women are especially likely to depend on adult offspring for support through coresidence. (NB)

**********
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
**********

ED304602

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
✓ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Teresa M. Cooney
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

# Coresidence with Adult Children:

# A Comparison of Divorced and Widowed Women

Teresa M. Cooney*

Carolina Population Center

The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

*The author is supported by a postdoctoral research fellowship from the National Institute for Child Health and Human Development, Grant #5T32HD07168, awarded to the Carolina Population Center.

Paper presented at the Annual Meetings of the Gerontological Society of America, San Francisco, CA., November 21, 1988.

CG021475

## Introduction

Adult children are a major source of support for parents, particularly mothers, following marital disruption. Past work reveals that of all kin relations, they are the most active providers of help for women following the death of a spouse (Lopata, 1978, 1979). Less attention has centered on family supports for older divorced individuals. Yet, in one exploratory study of divorce in mid-life, one-quarter of women identified an adult child as most helpful in the postdivorce period (Hagestad et al., 1984). Only 5% of men reported such views. Thus, at least for women, adult offspring appear to be valuable supports following divorce and widowhood.

One way adult children can provide on-going emotional, instrumental and/or economic support for recently widowed or divorced parents is by sharing a residence with them. Lopata's (1973) early work showed that few widows actually choose this support option. But, there was a greater likelihood of coresidence with adult children for widows who were relatively young at the time of their spouse's death. Perhaps age determines the support options available to widows, or age may be related to women's need for familial support following marital disruption (Blau, 1961). More representative and recent samples are required, however, to explore whether these same patterns exist for widows today.

There are few studies regarding the likelihood of coresidence for recent divorcées and their adult offspring. (Lawton, 1981, considers living arrangements of the divorced and separated, but does not control for the recency of the event.) However, this issue is increasingly important to consider since demographers project that in the future women will spend more time divorced and less time widowed than they do today (Griffith et al., 1985). In a paper given at these meetings, Uhlenberg and his associates

project that if current age-specific marriage, divorce, remarriage, and widowhood rates are maintained, over 20% of women born between 1955 and 1959 will be divorced when they reach age 50 and beyond. A smaller proportion of this cohort will be widowed. Given such projections, it is extremely important to advance our understanding of the living conditions and arrangements of older divorced women.

Since divorce may replace widowhood as the dominant form of singlehood for future cohorts of elderly women, this research focuses primarily on comparing family supports for these two groups of women. Specifically, I examine whether widows and divorcées differ in their use of coresidence with adult children as one means of family support following marital disruption.

For a number of reasons we expect differences in patterns of coresidence with adult offspring for divorced and widowed women. For example, some authors suggest that family relations and support may be jeopardized by divorce, since it often creates family conflict and tension. Berardo (1982) speculates that family members may feel less obligation towards divorced than widowed relatives. Furthermore, divorce may raise issues of conflicted loyalties between adult children and each parent, in which case offspring may avoid coresidence and the provision of other supports for parents, for fear of alienating one or the other. Evidence from the General Social Survey reveals that the divorced elderly are less satisfied with their family relations than are married and widowed persons (Uhlenberg & Myers, 1981). Perhaps the greater dissatisfaction of older divorced persons is because of relatively weak family connections and supports.

On the other hand, coresidence with adult children may be more common among divorced than widowed women. Divorce may be more economically devestating for women than widowhood; although both groups of women lose

their husband's income, only divorcées are typically required to split all remaining property with their husbands. For example, Weitzman (1985) points out that homes often are sold following divorce because women cannot afford to buy out their ex-husband's half. Thus, as a result of their loss of economic assets, divorcées may more often rely on adult children to provide housing assistance through coresidence than do widows.

In addition to exploring basic differences in the prevalence of coresidence for middle-aged and older divorcées and widows, I describe differences in other aspects of the coresidence situation for these two groups of women. First, I explore the role a woman's age plays in the type of living arrangements she selects following marital disruption. As noted, Lopata's work shows some effects of age on the likelihood of coresidence for widows. But, does the same hold true for divorcées? Second, I explore <u>where</u> coresiding mothers and their adult children live. Do formerly married mothers who coreside with adult offspring move in with them, or do adult children typically move back, or remain home? Who occupies the role of household head could influence intergenerational relations and interactions. Finally, I examine whether formerly married women more often reside with daughters than sons. Daughters are more likely than sons to be the principal caregiver of elderly parents who are ill or widowed (Brody, 1978; Troll, 1971). Similarly, a few studies of young adults whose parents divorced in middle age suggest that adult daughters are more likely than sons to report heightened feelings of concern, responsibility, empathy, and closeness to their mothers following divorce (Cooney, 1985; Cooney et al., 1986; Kaufman, 1987). Thus, daughters may be prime candidates for coresidence with their mothers following widowhood and divorce.

## Data and Methods

The data used in this study come from the June 1985 Marital and Fertility History Supplement to the Current Population Survey (CPS). This survey of a nationally representative sample required that all ever-married women over age 15, and all never-married women over age 18 report the number of births they had experienced. Information on the date of birth, gender, and current residence of their first four children and the last child, if more than five births, was also gathered.

Three conditions were used to restrict the sample for this study. First, the study was limited to ever-married women who indicated having at least one adult child, age 18 or older, in June 1985. Second, those having more than five births (10.9% of the women) were eliminated since incomplete information on all of their children might have underestimated the likelihood of coresidence with at least one adult child. Finally, about 20% of the cases were eliminated because of missing information regarding the offspring's current living arrangements (20% nonresponse is common for items on this survey). However, the extent of missing data does not appear to be problematic since nonresponse on the fertility supplement has been shown to be random across mothers' race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status (Bianchi, 1987). After these deletions, the final sample included 11,484 married (comparison group), 3,854 widowed, and 1,994 divorced women with adult children. The mothers ranged in aged from 32 to 99. Despite this great range, 80% were between 42 and 76 years old. In the analysis to follow, they are generally categorized into those less than aged 60 (middle age), and those 60 years and over (old age).

## Results

I begin the analysis by merely comparing the marital status groups on the percentage residing with at least one adult child. Married women are included in Table 1 to provide a basis for comparison. For middle-aged women, there are only slight differences between marital status groups; approximately half the women in each group coreside with an adult child, with the percentage being slightly lower for divorced women. For older women, marital status differences are more evident, but still are not striking. Not surprisingly, widows are more likely than married women to be residing with an adult child. However, more interesting is that the two groups of formerly married women--the widows and divorcées--do not differ substantially in the likelihood of coresidence with adult children. Slightly more than one-quarter of the women in each group reside with an adult child.

---- Table 1 about here ----

If coresidence with offspring is a means of support during the initial period of adjustment following marital disruption, perhaps recency of marital disruption plays a role in coresidence patterns. Furthermore, timing of marital disruption in a woman's life course may influence her residential arrangements, since the age at which individuals become widowed has been associated with the amount of extrafamilial support and interaction they experience following the event (Blau, 1961). Therefore, in the next analysis, widows and divorcées are subdivided into those who experienced marital disruption recently--within the last 5 years--and those who experienced the event longer ago (see Table 2).

----Table 2 about here----

These data indicate that age, recency of disruption, and type of marital disruption all play a role in women's patterns of coresidence with adult offspring. For middle-aged women, there are no significant group differences in the proportion who share a residence with an adult child (Note 1). Recently widowed women are only slightly more likely than other women to be living in such a situation (55% compared to about 50%). However, among older women, marital status differences are more substantial. First, recent widows and married women are significantly less likely than others to be living with an adult child; only about one-fifth of these women report such a pattern. In contrast, over a quarter of long-term widows and divorcées have an adult child in the household. Still more striking, however, is that over 40% of recently divorced older women are coresiding with an adult child. This proportion is significantly greater ($p < .05$) than those for all four of the other groups. (The test statistic takes into account the different Ns for the groups.) Therefore, the relative likelihood of coresidence with adult children is somewhat increased for women who become widowed in middle age, and is significantly increased for those who become divorced in old age.

So far, the analysis has not considered <u>where</u> formerly married mothers and their adult child(ren) coreside. The type of living arrangement coresiders have is specified in Table 3. The first column of Table 3 reveals that only a small proportion of middle-aged formerly married women who share a residence with adult children live in someone else's household. Approximately 7-9% of widows who share a residence with adult offspring report such arrangements, compared to 10-11% of divorcées. Thus it appears

that in their mothers' middle-age years, adult children of formerly married women generally stay on at home, or move back home as a means of coresiding. But, residential arrangements differ markedly for older women. While fewer than 20% of recent widows who reside with adult offspring report living in someone else's household, between 30 and 40% of older long-term divorcées and widows who share a residence with an adult child do not head the household. Thus, older women whose husbands have died recently are much less likely than women who have been single a longer time to have left their residence to reside with an adult child. But, we find the opposite pattern for older women who have divorced recently. Over half of these women who share a residence with an adult child are not household heads. So, older women appear highly likely to leave their households and move in with adult children following recent divorce. This pattern may reflect the extreme financial loss older women from long-term marriages experience following divorce (Weitzman, 1985).

----Table 3 about here----

The last question we address pertains to the gender of adult children who reside with their mothers. The literature indicates that quite often it is one adult child who assumes the majority of parent caregiving in times of need, and typically that child is a daughter (Brody, 1985). Approximately 7 of 10 middle-aged women, and 80 to 90% of older women in this sample who coreside with adult children have only one adult offspring in residence with them. Table 4 presents information pertaining to the gender of adult offspring who coreside with their mothers.

----Table 4 about here----

The data in Table 4 are presented in the form of sex-ratios indicating the proportion of coresidence cases involving a daughter to that involving a son. A ratio of 1.00 indicates an equal number of cases involving sons and daughters. A ratio of 1.25 indicates a 25% greater chance of cases involving daughters than sons, whereas a ratio of .75 indicates a 25% greater chance of cases involving sons than daughters. Among middle-aged married, widowed (both recent and long-term), and long-term divorced women, there is about a 20% greater likelihood that the adult child in residence is a son rather than a daughter. However, the pattern is reversed for recent divorcées. For these women, there is a 25% greater likelihood that the adult child sharing a household with them is a daughter rather than a son. These same patterns exist in households containing more than one adult child. That adult sons are more likely than daughters to be residing with middle-aged mothers is not surprising since adult offspring who live with their parent(s) are usually unmarried, and men tend to marry later than women (Glick & Lin, 1986). The unique pattern observed for recently divorced middle-aged women may lend support to the finding from other studies that adult daughters and mothers develop special bonds of closeness and support following the mothers' mid or later life divorce (Cooney, 1985; Cooney et al., 1986; Kaufmann, 1987).

In contrast to patterns found in middle age, in old age daughters are more likely than sons to be sharing a residence with their formerly married mothers. For older long-term widows and divorcées, and recent divorcées, the chances are overwhelming that a daughter rather than a son is residing with them. (The chances are about 40% greater for the first two groups, and tripled for recent divorcées.) Only married women and long-term widows are

more likely to have an adult son rather than a daughter living in the household (21% and 11% greater, respectively). The gender patterns are in the same direction, but slightly weaker, in cases where more than one adult child resides with the mother. In sum, it appears that in old age, when the children of a formerly married woman are likely to be married themselves, she is generally much more likely to reside with a daughter than a son, especially following a recent divorce.

## Discussion

My intention was to describe differences between widows and divorcées in their use of coresidence with adult offspring as a type of family support following marital disruption. Such a comparison was deemed to be important since divorce is likely to replace widowhood as the dominant form of singlehood for future cohorts of older women.

The results of the analysis indicate that coresidence patterns do differ for these two groups of women, and that the recency of the marital disruption, and age are significant factors in these differences. During middle age, widows, particularly recent ones, are slightly more likely than divorcees to have adult children in the household. But, in old age the pattern reverses, with the chances of coresidence being substantially greater for recently divorced women than widows.

These results suggest that when the type of marital disruption occurs "off-time"--that is widowhood in middle age, and divorce in old age--women are especially likely to depend on adult offspring for support through coresidence. Evidence Blau (1961) presented over two decades ago also revealed that when transitions such as widowhood occur "off-time" and place an individual in a social position different from most of his/her age and sex peers, social participation is likely to be adversely affected. Thus, the

data presented here suggest that perhaps the daily companionship and support of adult children are important substitutes for nonfamilial supports that are often lost following such off-time transitions.

Differences between divorced and widowed women were also revealed in who they turn to for coresidential support. Cases of coresidence involving daughters rather than sons were more likely among divorced than widowed women in both age groups. Thus, the supportive adult daughter whom we often hear about appears especially valuable in the life of divorced middle-aged and older women. This finding is consistent with previous studies of divorce in mid to later life which show that compared to sons, adult daughters are more likely to assume added responsibility for their mothers, and to report concern for, and intensified relations with their mothers following divorce (Cooney, 1985; Kaufmann, 1987). Perhaps if divorce becomes a more common part of the later life course for women in the future, as demographers project, the mother-daughter bond may become even more significant than it is already. Indeed, it has been suggested that as a result of divorce and other demographic trends, we may very well see a stonger "female axis" in families in the 21st century than we do today (Hagestad, 1986).

Another difference between widowed and divorced women who reside with adult offspring is that divorced women are more likely than widows to share a residence in which they are not the household head. It is safe to assume that in the majority of these cases the adult child, or his/her spouse is the householder. This pattern could have significant implications for family relations. For example, the woman who moves in with her offspring may be more financially dependent than the one who remains in her own household. Such dependence could place strain on the parent-child relationship (Johnson & Bursk, 1977). Furthermore, moving into the home of an adult child may

require a long-distance move for the mother, in which case her social network could be drastically altered. As a result, such women may depend even more on their adult offspring for companionship and emotional support, which could also affect the quality of the parent-child relationship (Mindel & Wright 1982). Of course, much of this is just speculation, but it points to the need for more research on the influence of shared living on the quality of adult child-parent relations.

Finally, there are two issues that cannot be overlooked when considering the implications of these findings for research on parent-child relations in later life. First, it is important to consider whether the patterns of coresidence revealed here will change as divorce becomes a more common experience of old age, and as modern cohorts of women reach old age. For example, if coresidence with adult offspring is selected primarily as a means of social support following divorce, then future cohorts of women may choose this arrangement less often than do elderly women today, since they are likely to have more age peers who share their marital situation, and who can thus provide understanding and emotional support. Or, if coresidence is based primarily on economic considerations, future patterns may also change, since future cohorts of older women may be better equipped than today's elderly women to handle financial independence because of their history of labor force involvement.

Last of all, we must emphasize the need for more research on parent-child relationships involving men. Perhaps even more important than the issues raised here is the question of how divorce will influence the later life living arrangements and family relations of men. Studies of younger children show that father-child interaction is reduced dramatically following divorce (Furstenberg et al., 1983). And, the few studies focused on mid and later

life divorces also suggest that the relationship between fathers and adult children, particularly their adult daughters, may be vulnerable following divorce (Cooney, 1985; Cooney et al., 1986; Kaufmann, 1987). Since daughters play such a central role in family caregiving and support networks, it is important to ask who divorced men will turn to for support in their old age. Family supports are likely to be severely limited for men who do not remarry following divorce if current gender differences in family caregiving are maintained. In sum, divorce raises many interesting and serious questions about the nature of family interdependencies in the future for both aging men and women.

## Notes

1. Differences in proportions between the groups were tested with a significance test suggested by Bohrnstedt and Knoke (1988: 198). The test is analogous to a t-test of means, since the mean of a dichotomous variable scored 1-0 is the proportion of cases with the value of 1. For example, with regard to the proportion residing with an adult child, the mean for a specific group is the percentage residing with an adult child.

References

BERARDO, D. H. (1982). Divorce and remarriage at middle age and beyond. The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 464, 132-139.

BIANCHI, S. M. (1987). Living at home: Young adults' living arrangements in the 1980s. Unpublished manuscript, U.S. Bureau of the Census.

BLAU, Z. S. (1961). Structural constraints on friendships in old age. American Sociological Review, 26, 429-439.

BOHRNSTEDT, G. W. & KNOKE, D. (1988). Statistics for social data analysis. Itasca, IL: F. E. Peacock.

BRODY, E. M. (1978). The aging of the family. The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 438, 13-27.

BRODY, E. M. (1985). Parent care as a normative family stress. The Gerontologist, 25, 19-29.

COONEY, T. M. (1985). Parental divorce in young adulthood: Implications for the parent-child relationship. Unpublished Master's Thesis, The Pennsylvania State University.

COONEY, T. M., SMYER, M. A., HAGESTAD, G. O., & KLOCK, R. C. (1986). Parental divorce in young adulthood: Some preliminary findings. American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 56, 470-477.

FURSTENBERG, F. F., JR., NORD, C. W., PETERSON, J. L. & ZILL, N. (1983). The life course of children of divorce: Marital disruption and parental contact. American Sociological Review, 48, 656-668.

GLICK, P. C. & LIN, S. L. (1986). Young adults living with parents. Journal of Marrriage and the Family, 48, 107-112.

GRIFFITH, J. D., SUCHINDRAN, C. M. & KOO, H. P. (1985). Cohort change in the marital life course: An analysis of marital life histories using multistate life-table techniques. Paper presented at the annual meetings of the Population Association of America, Boston.

HAGESTAD, G. O. (1986). The aging society as a context for family life. Daedulus, 115, 119-139.

HAGESTAD, G. O., SMYER, M. A. & STIERMAN, K. L. (1984). Parent-child relations in adulthood: The impact of divorce in middle age. In R. Cohen, S. Weissman & B. Cohler (Eds.), Parenthood: Psychodynamic Perspectives. New York: Guilford Press.

JOHNSON, E. S. & BURSK, B. J. (1977). Relationships between the elderly and their adult children. The Gerontologist, 17, 90-96.

KAUFMANN, K. S. (1987). Parental separation and divorce during the college years: Gender differences in the response of young adults. Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Harvard University.

LAWTON, M. P. (1981). An ecological view of living arrangements. The Gerontologist, 21, 59-66.

LOPATA, H. Z. (1973). Widowhood in an American city. Cambridge, MA: Schenkman.

LOPATA, H. Z. (1979). Women as widows. New York: Elsevier.

LOPATA, H. Z. (1978). Contributions of extended families to the support systems of metropolitan area widows: Limitations of the modified kin network. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 40, 355-364.

MINDEL, C. H. & WRIGHT, R., JR. (1982). Satisfaction in multigenerational households. Journal of Gerontology, 37, 483-489.

TROLL, L. E. (1971). The family in later life: A decade review. The Journal of Marriage and the Family, 33, 263-290.

UHLENBERG, P., BOYD, R. & COONEY, T. M. (1988). Divorce after midlife. Paper presented at the Annual Meetings of the Gerontological Society of American, San Francisco, November.

UHLENBERG, P. & MYERS, M. A. P. (1981). Divorce and the elderly. The Gerontologist, 21, 276-282.

WEITZMAN, L. J. (1985). The divorce revolution: The unexpected social and economic consequences for women and children in America. New York: The Free Press.

Table 1. Percentage of Women[1] Residing with an Adult Child, by Age and Marital Status

| Marital Status | Age | |
|---|---|---|
| | <60 | 60+ |
| Married | 52.1 (7412)* | 19.2 (4072) |
| Widowed | 52.5 (592) | 26.9 (3262) |
| Divorced | 49.6 (1505) | 28.6 (489) |

[1]All women included here have at least one child aged 18 or over.

*Numbers in parentheses refer to total N for the age-marital status group.

Table 2. Percentage of Women[1] Residing with an Adult Child, by Age, Marital Status, and Recency[2] of Marital Disruption

| Marital Status and Recency | Age | |
|---|---|---|
| | <60 | 60+ |
| Married | 52.1 (7412)* | 19.2 (4072) |
| Widowed, long term | 49.0 (353) | 28.4 (2556) |
| Widowed, recently | 55.2 (239) | 21.5 (706) |
| Divorced, long term | 49.6 (984) | 26.6 (432) |
| Divorced, recently | 49.7 (521) | 43.9 (57) |

[1]All women included here have at least one child aged 18 or over.

[2]Recent disruptions include divorces and deaths within the last five years. Long-term disruptions occurred more than five years ago.

*Numbers in parentheses refer to total N for the age-marital status group.

Table 3. Percentage of Coresiding Women[1] Who Are Not Household Heads, by Age, Marital Status, and Recency[2] of Marital Disruption

| Marital Status and Recency | Age | |
|---|---|---|
| | <60 | 60+ |
| Widowed, long term | 8.7 (173)* | 39.9 (725) |
| Widowed, recently | 6.8 (132) | 17.1 (152) |
| Divorced, long term | 11.1 (488) | 31.3 (115) |
| Divorced, recently | 10.0 (259) | 56.0 (25) |

[1]All women included here are residing with at least one adult child aged 18 or over.

[2]Recent disruptions include divorces and deaths within the last five years. Long-term disruptions occurred more than five years ago.

*Numbers in parentheses refer to total number of women in the age-marital status group residing with adult children.